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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the Arkansas alternative plan for teacher certification, provides a profile of the persons involved in the pilot, and compares this plan with the Association of Teacher Educators' recommendations for minimum standards for alternative certification programs. Upon completion of a 3-week intensive training session, the apprentice teacher becomes eligible for placement in qualifying school districts. Additional training is provided during the school year and through a second intensive summer training session. The plan utilizes trained master teacher mentors. Throughout the training program, apprentice teachers are evaluated according to the same regulations and procedures which govern the evaluation of fully certified teachers in the participating districts. (JD)

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Alternative Certification:
Pathway to Success or Blind Alley to the Teacher Shortage

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ABSTRACT

Alternative Certification:
Pathway to Success or Blind Alley to the Teacher Shortage

The purpose of this article is to present the Arkansas alternative plan for certification, to provide a profile of the persons involved in the pilot and to compare this plan with the Association of Teacher Educators' recommendations for minimum standards for alternative certification programs, and with current NCATE requirements for the approval of teacher education programs.

Alternative Certification:
Pathway to Success or Blind Alley to the Teacher Shortage

For the past few years education in Arkansas has been in a state of flux, and teacher education and the certification process has not been excluded. The process of certification has been questioned in terms of its ownership and control and consequently the importance of schools of education. During the 1988-89 school year the Arkansas State Department of Education initiated a plan for alternative certification. Few persons from schools of education were included in the planning and fewer have been involved in the implementation. Because of this lack of involvement, classroom teachers and professors from the state's schools of education have limited information of the plan and process.

The purpose of this presentation is to present the Arkansas alternative plan for certification, to provide a profile of the persons involved in the pilot, and to compare this plan with the Association of Teacher Educators' recommendations for minimum standards for alternative certification programs. This presentation will also compare this plan with current NCATE accreditations requirements.

THE ARKANSAS ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PLAN

In an Arkansas Department of Education memorandum to the State Board of Education listed as agenda item no. 17 dated September 14, 1988, Dr. Ruth S. Steele, Director of Education, recommended "that the State Board authorize an alternative certification Pilot project designed to allow a limited number of individuals to receive training and enter a master teacher mentoring program."

The plan recommended to the State Board consists of the following:

I. RATIONALE

Documented teacher certification shortages existed in the 1987-88 school year and are expected to expand into the next decade. More that 80% of the school districts in Arkansas were reported as having certification deficiencies this year, In some certification areas, these deficiencies are acute: nearly two-thirds of all Arkansas students taking Physics and journalism and one-third of all students are taught by individuals who are not fully certified. With a declining enrollment in teacher education programs and an aging teacher population throughout the state, we must devise innovative means for tapping a rich pool of experienced people who may wish to enter the teaching field. This proposal for an alternative plan provides a means to attract and train qualified individuals to stem the growing teacher shortage and to provide quality education for the children of Arkansas.

II. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Alternative Certification Pilot Project is a three-year program which would allow no more than 50 qualified participants each year to engage in an initial three-week intensive summer training session. Upon successful completion of this initial training session, the apprentice teacher would be granted a one-year renewable provisional certificate and become eligible for placement in qualifying school districts as full-time or part-time employees. During the first year, the apprentice teachers would work under the aegis of trained master teacher mentors. Additional educational training would be provided during the school year and through a second intensive summer training session, which would be tailored to meet the identified needs of individual apprentice teachers. Both the participants and the various program components would be evaluated in a variety of ways. Throughout the training program, apprentice teachers will be evaluated according to the same regulations and procedures which govern the evaluation of fully certified teachers in the participating districts.

III. SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The selection committee is permitted some degree of flexibility, but qualified applicants are expected to meet the following guidelines:

1. A minimum of a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university

2. For secondary certification, a non-education major in the content area in which certification is sought. For elementary certification, an appropriate degree and consideration of relevant work experience

3. A cumulative grade point average of 2.75 or 3.0 in the last sixty hours of degree work, with a 3.0 grade point average in the major field

4. Three character references

5. Demonstration of good communication skills through both an interview conducted by the selection committee and a written work history

6. A passing score on the NTE specialty area test or a specially devised criterion-referenced test as established by the State Board of Education for certification before the issuance of a standard certificate.

Although the selection committee will be permitted some degree of flexibility on otherwise qualified candidates, it is the express intent of this program to provide an alternative method for certification of persons making a career change to enter the field of education, and not to provide a method to circumvent established teacher education programs.

IV. SELECTION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Any school district wishing to participate in the Alternative Certification Pilot Program will be considered under the following guidelines:

1. Documented need for alternative certification program, including a past history of difficulty in recruiting certified teachers in the position(s) to be filled

2. Ability to meet Master Teacher Mentoring program qualifications

3. Commitment from school board and appropriate school personnel to fulfill program requirements, including superintendent, principal, and mentor teachers.

During the three years of their training, apprentice teachers will not be listed as certification violations in participating districts.

V. TRAINING PROGRAM

The initial three-week intensive summer training session and additional follow-up training will focus on the components of effective teaching. Frequent demonstration teaching which simulates the actual classroom setting will occur. Apprentice teachers will receive training in the following areas:

1. Various teaching models such as Program for Effective Teaching (PET)

2. Variety of methodology

3. Classroom management and discipline skills, including some components of Assertive Discipline

4. Elements of the psychology of learning

5. Motivation theory and application

6. Learning/teaching styles

7. Communication/human relations skills

8. Thinking skills

9. Student assessment techniques

10. Location and use of resources

11. School policies, regulations, and law

VI. MASTER TEACHER MENTORING PROGRAM

Master teacher mentors will meet the following criteria:

1. Desire to serve as a mentor
2. Evidence of teaching excellence as recognized by students, peers, and/or professional organizations
3. An advanced degree preferred and excellent academic achievement
4. Certification in teaching areas
5. Five years of teaching experience, at least two of which are in-district
6. Evidence of continuous professional involvement
7. Good interpersonal skills
8. Participation in initial and on-going mentor training programs
9. Three recommendations, one from the principal and two from any of the following: teachers, counselors, and/or parents

Initial training for selected mentors will include techniques of clinical supervision, conferencing skills, design and evaluation of lesson plans and tests, and demonstration teaching.

The mentoring program will include the following components:

1. Weekly pre-planning with apprentice teacher
2. Daily conferencing with apprentice teacher
3. Frequent classroom observation with data collection and feedback
4. Previewing of tests and reviewing of test results with diagnostic application to instruction
5. Resource identification
6. Provision of support and assistance in any identified need area
7. Accurate records of mentoring activities
8. Willingness to evaluate program and to be evaluated as mentors

The mentoring program shall be designed to meet the needs of the school district, mentors, and apprentice teachers. Release time and monetary compensation will be commensurate with assigned duties. Apprentice teachers, administrators, mentors, and others will participate in evaluating the mentoring program.

VII. FOLLOW-UP TRAINING

Apprentice teachers will participate in additional training each semester during the first school year. A training session tailored to the identified need areas of apprentice teachers will occur during the summer following the first year of employment. The staff development plan supervised by the local school district will provide continuing supplemental training in instructional skills for apprentice teachers.

VIII. PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Alternative Certification Pilot Project will use both formative and summative evaluation methods. Each training session will be evaluated by apprentice teachers, administrators, and mentors. Other data collected for total program evaluation will include retention rates of apprentice teachers, and student evaluations of apprentice teachers. A long-term follow-up study of participants in the Alternative Certification Pilot Project also is planned. The Arkansas Department of Education will seek avenues for independent examination of data collected for evaluative purposes.

IX. BUDGET

Each program participant will pay an annual fee of approximately $500 per year for each of the first two years to finance the training program. It should not be inferred that this is adequate financing for the Alternative Certification Pilot Project. The staff of the Department of Education will analyze the actual cost of the training program and recommend to the State Board of Education and others a satisfactory way of funding a successful continuing Alternative Certification Pilot Project.

PROFILE OF PERSONS INVOLVED IN THE PILOT

Repeated requests to the State Department of Education yielded little information about the participants. Although the authors requested blind information based on the criteria publicized, information supplied gave the following profile:

11 participants
5 females
6 males
Teaching Assignments 89-90
5 not teaching
6 teaching (high school)
2 private schools
4 public schools
no elementary teachers

COMPARISON OF ARKANSAS PLAN TO ATE RECOMMENDED STANDARDS
(FOURTH DRAFT, FALL 1989)

I. **Beginning teachers need a broad program of general-liberal studies, common to all college graduates, which prepares them for lifelong learning and citizenship in a democratic society.**

Arkansas plan indicates that participate must have Bachelor's degree. No requirements are stipulated in terms of types of courses included or relationship between liberal arts courses and major.

II. **Basic Skills: the state examinations in basic skills required of students/graduates in regular teacher education programs should be required of candidates in alternative certification programs.**

No evidence presented that participants have taken the basic testing required of Arkansas Teachers or the PPST required of persons entering Teacher Education programs.

III. **Subject Matter Specialization: Alternative certification candidates should be required to pass the same state tests of subject matter proficiency required of regular teacher certification candidates.**

Participants are required to have a passing score on the NTE specialty area test or a specially devised criterion-reference test as established by the State Board of Education for certification before the issuance of a standard certification.

IV. **Candidates for alternative certification programs should be selected on the basis of more than test scores and transcript analysis: Personal interviews, structured to assess a candidate's orientations to the nature of teaching, the nature of students and the goals of the school must be part of the selection process.**

Personal interview is required; however, no information is available about the process.

V. **Selection of candidates should include an interview process that involves highly qualified teachers.**

No information available.

VI. **Selection of candidates must include an analysis of previous work/career history; failing at a variety of careers, poor performance in several jobs, extended periods of unemployment, unexplained periods in work histories, incarceration, hospitalization and a variety of other conditions are all characteristics of some adults who are college graduates.**

No information available.

VII. **Selection into an alternative certification program should follow direct experiences with children/youth.**

There is no evidence in the Arkansas Plan that this is a consideration. This issue is not addressed.

VIII. **Wherever possible, prior direct experiences with children (VII above) should be in the very same school buildings where candidates will begin as regular teachers.**

This issue is not addressed in the Arkansas Plan.

IX. **Districts using alternative programs should seek to hire at least 10 percent more candidates than their projected need.**

This issue is not addressed in the Arkansas Plan.

X. **Alternative candidates should be paid for the direct, supervised experiences indicated in IV and VII above. State and/or district funds should be provided for alternative candidates to be paid at the same rate as that of the beginning alternative teacher.**

No information available.

XI. **Experienced mentor teachers, with at least 20 percent assigned load at a ratio of 2:1 should serve as mentors and coaches of alternative candidates throughout their first year. During 2nd and 3rd years this ratio might change to 8:1 or 10:1. During the first year, the experienced teachers serving as mentors should be in the same school building.**

This issue is not addressed in the Arkansas Plan.

XII. **Experienced teachers serving as mentor teachers should be selected by a panel of highly qualified teachers and administrators on openly stated criteria and be paid extra on the basis of the number of candidates supervised.**

XIII. **Mentor teachers should receive special training in coaching, mentoring alternative candidates.**

This plan provides for special training. See section VI of the Arkansas Alternative Plan.

XIV. **Alternative teacher certification candidates should not be required to take more than one 3 credit course per semester (or 45 hours of instruction) -- from any source -- during their first year of teaching. During the first semester of their first year candidates should be assigned less than a full teaching load.**

This plan does not include consideration of the above provision.

XVI. **Alternative programs are more costly than regular programs (VI, VII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII above). They should be offered for the purpose of recruiting new talented personnel into teaching and not as a means of saving money.**

Currently participants pay $500 each to the State Department of Education. There is no other budget information available.

XVII. **The content of professional studies offered in alternative certification programs should be offered in cooperation with schools of education.**

Alternate training will take place in the auditorium of Arkansas State Department of Education. No information available on who taught classes. (Memo dated May 19, 1989)

XVIII. **Alternative certification programs should be evaluated and such evaluations should be part of the public record. Alternative candidates should be evaluated using the same criteria applied to other beginning teachers.**

Plan provides for this provision.

XIX. **School districts utilizing alternative teacher certification programs should have an advisory/policy board to oversee the program. Membership on these boards should include teachers, teacher educators, administrators, school board members, and alternative candidates.**

This is not a part of the plan.

XX. **The number of individuals employed by a public school district and the subjects/grades they teach should be part of a public record.**

The information is not easily obtainable.

XXI. **States should issue a temporary "Alternative Certification License" to individuals participating in these programs.**

Not a part of the plan.

XXII. **Recommendations for regular ("permanent") certification should be made by a panel of master teachers on openly stated criteria.**

Not a part of the plan.

COMPARISON OF ARKANSAS ALTERNATIVE PLAN TO NCATE STANDARDS

In Arkansas all Schools of Education must be NCATE approved in order to certify teachers to teach in the State's schools. Under the new Redesign, State schools are tightening standards in terms of PPST scores for admission to teacher education, increasing G.P.A. requirements, strengthening faculty, giving curricula emphasis to the exceptional child, at-risk child, multi-cultural and global concerns and adding greater emphasis on field experiences at all levels. As these efforts are being made to upgrade teacher preparation, the alternative certification plan for the state provides for entry into teaching with minimal preparation. Crash courses, for the most part provided during weekends, provide participants with on-the-job training.

Teacher mentors, who carry a full teaching load, provide assistance as needed. NCATE standards have increased requirements for Schools of Education; few of these standards are reflected in the Arkansas Alternative Plan.